

prometheus

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prometheus

by [Maven_Morozov](#)

Summary

Alina, his mind chanted. He had wished not to be alone, in the end.

Don't let me be alone.

Don't let me—

The thorn wood pierced his heart.

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Exhausted from her own lies, Alina visits Aleksander at the thorn wood.

Notes

rule of wolves spoilers - you have been warned.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Isn't it lovely, all alone

Heart made of glass, my mind of stone

Tear me to pieces, skin to bone

Hello, welcome home

- *Lovely*, Billie Eilish & Khalid

It was not the same as the *obisbaya*, the Fabrikators at the thorn wood tree had said. It was not a simple cleansing ritual, as was the tradition. Aleksander had known this. He had *needed* it; something in his bones pulled him to the knowledge of what he was meant to do.

Like calls to like. In one body, in many lives, he had been an amplifier. The thorn wood was an artifact of an ancient time, too.

“I am not sorry,” he had whispered, the sound of feet upon thin grass slipping away beyond the reaches of his mind. Gone were Korol Renzi and Stormwitch, Genya who had suffered for Ravka’s gain against her will, the monks gathered with a storm in their eyes, ancient wisdom in their dull eyes. It was just him, alone. As he had feared.

“I do not repent!” he had screamed. “All I did, I did for Ravka. And now, I do this too.”

The terrified thumping of his own heart drowned out the rest. He felt his mouth moving, saw in some form of periphery the thorn approaching him, a sinuous, sickening vine, but it was just that—a bland periphery.

To the surface of his mind rose the only one who had known him, truly, and in such a short time. Thin brown hair, matted, too, the way it was when he had first seen her. Sullen brown eyes that informed him of their shared heritage, wide face, and all the more beautiful for it. She hadn’t had the shine of her grisha power then, but it hadn’t mattered. It had never mattered to him.

Alina, his mind chanted. He had wished not to be alone, in the end.

Don’t let me be alone.

Don’t let me—

The thorn wood pierced his heart.

Aleksander screamed, his chest burning, all traces of that confidence and immortality dissipated completely. He felt raw and exposed, surrounded only by his enemies, those who he had wronged. Nikolai, who carried the remnants of a demon. Genya, scars ridden across her face and body touched by a corrupt king. Zoya, heart fierce, forged from a fire blown across Ravka through the winds that only a Squaller could create. He had turned her into a manipulator, made her jealous, made her mind twist irreversibly. And now, she was stronger than any of that. He could see the dragon within her, and knew that she would show no mercy. He had to admit, somewhere in what was left of his black heart, a heart shrivelled from war and sacrifice, he was proud of her.

The thorn wood swallowed him then, and Aleksander was ensconced in darkness, this time not of his own creation. The spike in his chest tore at every muscle in his body; he felt as if he were being split and put back together again, only for the cycle to repeat.

The pain came in waves, he realised, for there were brief moments of reprieve where Aleksander could only feel an intense throbbing ache, and in those moments, he thought of Alina. Her smile. Her sarcasm. Her wit. Her power. Her beauty. The way she had held him, in the end. He could ignore the way she had jibed him while he inhabited Yuri's body. Words hadn't mattered, her eyes could reflect back all the difference. The negative space held the truth, as it always had, dark within light.

And then the receding pain would prove to be a ruse, and the thorn in his heart would spike, would thrash as the barrier begged to loosen. *No*, Aleksander said in his mind. There was no point in speaking aloud. The tree's interior swallowed the sound, and there was no one to hear him, besides.

He was truly, forever alone.

The cruel irony, spat his mind. *Aren't you infuriated?*

He was not. This was for Ravka. It was everything he had promised he'd do.

—

Zoya's coronation was a stunning affair. It was nothing less than Alina had expected for the first grisha queen, the Stormwitch, Zoya of the Garden, Zoya the dragon, first of the Nazyalensky line.

Mal at her side, Alina greeted her old friends, embraced Genya tightly, longer than the rest. When she pulled away, she could feel the wetness of tears on the corner of her shawl. Genya smiled then, wiped her eyes, shook her head, walked away to meet with Zoya again. Alina didn't expect her old friend to see her as someone who understood; after all, she had Mal, the love of her life, right next to her, the peace and quiet she had wanted since she was sixteen.

But she *did* understand. Genya had never known the depths of Alina's feelings—no one ever had, not even Mal. And still, Alina missed her balance, the other half of her soul. *Aleksander*. It was a plea that echoed in her soul, in her mind, throughout her body. He had been right, she knew. There was no one like them, even in the absence of her power. She missed him beyond

reason. She missed him so badly that it felt as if her white hair was a curse, and when she looked in the mirror, she wanted to tear it out to forget the gift he'd given to her.

Mal tried to comfort her, those nights, but Alina would steal the lantern, escape into the woods, leave the children and her husband, feet bare on the hard, cold ground, dirt building between her toes. The darkness of the forest, the near-pitch black, it was the closest thing Alina could get to truly seeing him again.

And then he had come to her. It had been too compelling of a call to resist. So she had met with Aleksander and Zoya at his side, the Squaller's expression stony, eyes clouded with hatred. Alina had panicked. The emotions she had longed to express failed her, and Mal, at her side, was expectant of a certain performance. So was Zoya.

So she gave them what they wanted. She was stiff. Removed. *I never loved him*, she told herself.

Lies taste sweet on the tongue, she often told the orphanage children. *But sweet things make teeth ache and stomachs churn.*

Alina's stomach churned, even now at the coronation, her statement about the Darkling's sacrifice in the thorn wood blunt and matter-of-fact. Even Genya had been lightly surprised.

But before she and Mal left, she received the directions to the monastery where the thorn wood lay, waiting for her. *Like calls to like*. The saying was both a blessing and a curse, it had been all her life. As an *otkazat'sya*, it meant nothing, and in this powerless world, it was only love that called her likeness back to her soul.

Is that not the most powerful form of calling? Of like calling to like?

Her cynical mind had returned to her.

A week later, in the cover and comfort of night, Alina left a note on the bedside table for her husband and fled into the night. Alone, hidden by wood some called magical and some called blessed, Aleksander waited.

—

Despite what he should have known, Aleksander had not expected the pain to be as strong as it had first been weeks and months later. But it was. And it would be. Forever.

Despair was beginning to settle in, and with each throb of the thorn in his heart, he became stiller. His body slumped against the wood; he felt its living tendrils caress his arms and tie him into the trunk's interior. He wondered if its words to him, barely a comfort, were real or only his imagination. Had it been months, in fact, or perhaps just a few hours? And maybe it had been years.

Time was an illusion, an untruth in a world where eternity was a heartbeat and a neverending stretch of long, tiring road all at once.

Each moment was the same, until—

Aleksander could feel something breaking through his consciousness. It was not the wood of the tree that gave way, nor the thorn blade piercing him. He was still the tree's child, its sacrifice. Only its newest member of the *obisbaya*, being suffering for his sins in the ash of Djel, the god of the Fjerdans.

No—this crack in the blockade came from something within *him*. Not him as the Darkling, nor him as Yuri, but him as *Aleksander*.

“Alina?” Aleksander whispered hoarsely. On the one word, his voice broke, chords in his throat straining painfully. He had not spoken in so long.

A heat, soft and gentle, so unlike the burn of the thorn, reached his side. It was a handprint, he could tell, a handprint of someone who had once been blessed as a grisha placing her palm on the thorn wood, five fingers splayed and forehead touching the trunk.

“Aleksander,” he heard, and something in his heart broke, sharper and hotter than the lance through his chest. That was nothing—that was physical. It was not the wrench of emotion elicited from that word he had heard in so long, his name from the mouth of someone that was not himself.

“Aleksander,” Alina murmured again. Outside, she pressed her lips to the trunk. “Remember when you told me to never let you be alone?”

He did, though it brought a headache to his temples, for there were no more tears left to shed.

“One day, we will see each other again.”

That, he doubted. With a bit of power he could manage to spare, Aleksander sent a tendril of darkness through a crack in the tree's white trunk, caressing her face. The thorn wood, thankfully, permitted him such an act. It was the most he could tell her. *It will be alright. But this is my fate. There is no other for me.*

“Zoya may yet have mercy.”

With breath, Aleksander could have laughed.

“She expressed to me your pain,” Alina continued, whispering the words into the bark. She leaned into the skein of darkness, letting it kiss her cheekbones and eyelids as she closed them. “I thought that was the stupidest thing ever, to tell *me* that.” She shook her head. “I guess she thinks I hate you as she always did.”

You don't hate me?

Oh, Alina did hate him, they both knew it. And she loved him too. But were the two really so different? Passion united the world, and both were infinite.

“The Stormwitch may surprise you,” Alina said at last, imagining that her hand running down the bark of the thorn wood was across Aleksander's hair or back. “She's done that and beyond for me. And I love you.”

Aleksander heard the words, and through his agony, he let out a shaky breath. It hurt for his lungs to move, for his throat to fold itself around words he had never dared to speak. "I love you."

He could still feel her presence there as she heard him, a comforting weight on the tree trunk, but soon enough, just a blink of an eye, and she was gone again, back into the dead of night, fading into obscurity.

He had wished not to be alone, in the end.

Yet, here he was.

End Notes

alina does not know yet that they are looking for the heart of Sankt Feliks. if I feel up to it, i may write a sequel/another chapter to this where aleksander is released from his eternal torment.

comments are appreciated!

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